

ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

Emvin Cremona – the family man behind the artist

On the occasion of the 101st birthday of the late Maltese artist Chevalier Emvin Cremona (1919-1987), **Denise Rejec** speaks to his daughter, **Anna Cremona**, who shares some personal recollections of the family-oriented man behind the artist persona.

Let's talk a bit about Emvin Cremona's artistry first. Which are the many facets of his artistic career?

My father was involved in a large range of artistic work. From painting of subjects both religious and profane in nature to designing postage stamps, stage designs, interior decoration, architecture, furnishings, artefacts and coinage.

For which artworks is your father most known for?

Certainly the many church paintings around Malta and Gozo, and the countless stamp designs he created between the late 1950s and early 1980s, for which Malta received international acclaim. Some stamp sets featured a number of innovations that were eventually eagerly adopted by other countries, including the UK. Consequently, Cremona is considered to have put Malta at the forefront of stamp design.

The *Madonna of the Airways* at the Malta International Airport departure lounge is undoubtedly the most viewed piece of work. The original is currently being held at MUŻA following its restoration after it was vandalised some years back.

Are there any public artworks that may go unnoticed despite their positioning in some of Malta's busy locations?

I can definitely pinpoint the grand main portal of Our Lady of Good Counsel Church in Paceville. The Malta Central Bank in Valletta has some very interesting Malta-themed works from Cremona's 1960s impasto period, together with some smaller works in pen and ink on paper board.

Can you tell us about some famous works that are on display outside of Malta?

Among other locations, works by my father are on show at the United Nations headquarters in New York, the World Health Organisation in Geneva and in the Queen Elizabeth II collection.

Time to get a bit more personal now. How would you describe your father?

He was a true family man, extremely jovial, very interested in what was happening around him locally and also beyond Malta's shores. A case in point: He travelled abroad specifically to visit important art exhibitions like the Venice Biennale. And I can still picture him at work in his studio with the radio tuned into some Italian station (no wireless Maltese stations then).

"I'm very lucky to be able to do what I enjoy best for a living: painting, designing and being creative"

– CHEVALIER EMVIN CREMONA

You definitely have many memories of him working away at his art. What are your recollections?

My father thoroughly enjoyed working from his home-based art studio as he preferred to be close to his family. He loved having us around and would often gather our opinions about his work. We were like his little judges.

However, I know that he was most productive when he had no interruptions. So he'd dedicate his nights to getting the major part of his work done while the rest of the family was sound asleep.



Emvin Cremona as a young student in London (c.1947). PHOTO: CREMONA ARCHIVES



Adoration of the Magi from the same period as the Ta' Pinu Gozo mosaics.

Your father's Valletta home was conveniently positioned overlooking the Grand Harbour. What was his home studio like?

His art studio occupied the first and second floors of our house, which was quite restricted in space for a family of four children. So the living quarters often served as an extension of the studio, with canvases stacked against as many walls as needed, even in some of the bedrooms.

The studio enjoyed lovely views over the Grand Harbour. It was so close to the viewing balcony in the Upper Barrakka Gardens, one could almost cross over on a plank board! The Ta' Liesse church dome was perfectly in view and even featured in a number of his easel paintings over the course of many years.

How did your father's role as 'master of painting' at the Malta School of Art influence young artists at the school during his tenure?



Cremona's artist impression of his own residence in Attard.

He involved his students in projects such as the interior decor of cinema theatres and the production of carnival floats, which undoubtedly helped them gain confidence in the artistic field.

Any personal notes you'd like to share?

My father once told me that when still very young, he had a dilemma as to which occupation to take up: orchestra maestro (he distinguished himself in his violin studies), chef or artist. Well, as we all know, he went for the last option, kept cooking as a hobby and never looked back.